

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE SPECIAL MEETING  
THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 2016 – 6:30 P.M.  
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Ackerman, Ambroise (6:40 p.m.) Bresnahan, Dauphinais (6:42 p.m.), Denno,  
Doyle, Fitzgerald, Greenleaf (6:49 p.m.), Heller, Koehler, Somers (7:08 p.m.),  
Trejo, Winkler  
Ex-Officio: Watson, Flax  
Staff: Oefinger, Graner, Kilpatrick, Bresnayan  
Consultant: Mike Zuba, Kemp Morhardt

Chairman Heller called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 11, 2016

There was no quorum present at the start of the meeting. At the end of the meeting, after a quorum had been declared, the following motion was made:

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Ambroise, to approve the minutes of February 11, 2016 as written.

The motion carried 12 votes in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention (Ambroise).

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS - None

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- a. Housekeeping Items - None
- b. Update on Meeting with State Department of Construction Services (DCS)

Mr. Zuba reported that a small contingency met with the State Department of Construction Services (DCS) on February 25<sup>th</sup> and made a presentation on the Groton 2020 plan, the history of referendums in Groton, the rationale of the plan, shifting demographics in Groton, and deferred maintenance/critical facility needs.

The group gained insight on how the legislative process works and the state asked for additional details. The consultant was able to present the “nuts and bolts” of the plan including consolidation of the middle schools and elimination of portable classrooms. It was emphasized that this is a comprehensive plan that cannot be done in phases. Overall Mr. Zuba felt it was a very positive meeting.

Graner agreed with Mr. Zuba's assessment. He explained that because the schools are not out of balance at this time, Groton cannot utilize the diversity grant so other options were discussed. The state would like Groton to present a specific number and state staff was directed to work with Groton.

Following the meeting, Mr. Zuba reviewed soft costs with Groton's leaders and asked Mr. Morhardt to update the construction schedule and cost estimates to include funds to acquire additional open space to offset the Merritt property.

Ambroise arrived at 6:40 p.m. and a quorum was declared.

Mr. Morhardt reviewed specific updates to the cost modeling and construction schedule, as well as the cost modeling assumptions.

Dauphinais arrived at 6:42 p.m.

Discussion followed on the time line change with construction deferred to March 2018 after design and the fact that a Project Labor Agreement would add 3% to 5% to the cost.

Mr. Morhardt provided an overview of Scenario 2 and the schedule. Students would be in the new buildings for the 2020 school year. Under the modified timeline, demolition of the old schools is deferred until after the new schools are occupied.

Greenleaf arrived at 6:49 p.m.

Mr. Morhardt reviewed the cost summary. The total project cost estimate stands at \$195,639,609 with a net cost to Groton of \$118,976,633.

Mr. Zuba reported that the State Board of Education Attorney explained that diversification status applies to schools that are over the 25% imbalance threshold as of October 1 in the year that the grant is applied for, therefore it is not the proper tool for Groton.

Mr. Morhardt further explained that the state requested that Groton produce a number less than 80% for requested assistance. Mr. Zuba explained that the survey results were used to demonstrate the price point that the public would support, which is approximately \$55 million. The proposed state share would then be \$141,000,000. The next step is to explain line by line plan details to DCS so they are in a better position to draft the legislation.

There continues to be a moratorium on interdistrict magnet schools. Graner noted that this one time request for assistance does not carry with it ongoing costs for the state like there would be for magnet schools or diversity schools. Heller added that the state recognizes the efforts Groton has made to achieve diversity through redistricting.

Mr. Morhardt concluded that the initial "ask" to the state would be for 74% reimbursement.

- c. School Facilities Initiative Task Force Recommendations for Town Council
- d. Public Outreach

Mr. Zuba stated that the next step is to bring the Task Force's recommendation to the Town Council Committee of the Whole on March 16<sup>th</sup> and to bring new Councilors up to speed on the project.

Somers arrived at 7:08 p.m.

The outcome of the special legislation is anticipated in late April. Task Force members are being asked to embrace the public education portion of the effort going forward.

Discussion followed on options if the special legislation doesn't pass. Winkler noted how the legislation could progress. Oefinger stated there are many unknowns, but the Town should assume the best. He then reviewed the process to bring this issue to referendum. Oefinger emphasized that everyone must be as positive as possible that the Town is doing everything to get this to the voters in November. The state wants to work with Groton, but Groton must show a desire to move ahead. This cannot be a case of "let the voters decide." Groton has a once in a lifetime opportunity that must not be squandered. Graner also weighed in on the need to be positive and assertive about the project, not ambivalent.

Somers suggested presenting the information in a neutral, factual way. She noted the need to address pre-conceived notions and suggested explaining the history of the project as well as the "language," which is unfamiliar to many people. The Town must also present a true picture of what the schools will look like if the plan is not approved.

Oefinger stated that the Town needs to be proud of these schools, as the state will be when they are finished. This project represents how schools should be done. Showcase schools are not a luxury, but are state of the art. Mr. Zuba reiterated that the state understands the need for buildings and programs that will successfully address diversity.

Watson suggested sending out an updated Frequently Asked Questions document and a glossary of frequently used terms addressing such issues as racial imbalance, the Merritt property, inter/intra district magnet school, etc. Handouts will give people talking points.

Flax asked about how an increase in enrollment would be addressed. Mr. Zuba explained how the square footage that Groton is eligible for is calculated. The buildings will be designed with some flexibility to adapt to changing needs. Mr. Morhardt noted that potential expansion is always considered in the design.

Mr. Zuba noted that the plan is not assuming operational savings at this time, but there is approximately \$270,000 in annual maintenance savings and \$1.2 million in administrative savings.

Discussion followed on concerns raised about traffic on Route 1. Mr. Zuba noted that the plan was reviewed with the Department of Transportation and they had no major concerns, but of course it would have to be fully designed.

Discussion followed on communicating debt service and assumptions to voters.

It is anticipated that information will be distributed to the Committee of the Whole at their regular meeting on March 8<sup>th</sup>.

Somers emphasized the need for the Town Clerk's office to produce an accurate explanatory text document.

Koehler stated that ground work to educate everyone is what is necessary to pass the referendum.

#### V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Winkler, to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.